

Leadership in National Defense: Challenges for the 112th Congress

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Thank you to the Foreign Policy Initiative for hosting me this afternoon, and giving me an opportunity to share my views on the state of the Department of Defense, our national security policy, and what we can expect from the 112th Congress.

This conference deals with leadership and that's exactly what I'd like to discuss with you today.

Whether it is the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, strengthening our military and investing in a force postured to meet the challenges of the 21st century or protecting the homeland from adversaries, like al Qaeda, who threaten our way of life, the new Congress will face a number of serious national security challenges. No weapon platform, technological innovation or even the best fighting force in the world can manage these problems alone. As General Omar Bradley said, "Leadership is intangible, and therefore no weapon ever designed can replace it." A strong America requires strong American leaders who embody the steely determination and indomitable will of the American people.

Success in Afghanistan

Al Qaeda, operating from safe havens provided by the repressive Taliban in Afghanistan, planned and launched the attacks on our homeland on September Eleventh.

We must take all necessary steps to ensure al Qaeda does not regain a sanctuary in either Afghanistan or Pakistan. Any withdrawal short of victory would demonstrate to al Qaeda and its affiliated groups that they only have to cause enough casualties or prolong a conflict in order to drive the United States out of regions once deemed vital to our national interest. Such an outcome would gravely threaten the security of America and its allies.

We neglected this theatre of war for too long. Now that we are finally appropriately focused on Afghanistan, we must succeed.

Leadership on Afghanistan

I have full confidence General Petraeus can achieve the President's objective of disrupting, dismantling, and defeating al Qaeda and preventing safe havens on both sides of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. But it is essential our Commander-in-Chief give our military the time and resources it needs to succeed.

The July 2011 withdrawal date that accompanied the President's December 9th announcement of the 30,000 surge forces was simply a mistake.

In Bob Woodward's book the President specifically tied the outcome of last year's Afghan policy review to political considerations, telling a visiting Senator the reason for the timelines and arbitrary troop limits was "I can't lose the whole Democratic Party."

Now that we're past the mid-term election, I hope the President's calculus will change. We've already seen public reports that the Administration is moving away from its July 2011 deadline. With Republicans leading the House, this gives the President the opportunity to focus on victory and not the politics of his caucus.

Bipartisan support for pursuing the strategic objectives in Afghanistan already exists. While the 2009 Afghanistan strategy review was reportedly "about how we're going to hand it off and get out of Afghanistan," we now have a new review coming up and a new commander. And I hope the focus from our leaders this time is on winning and not timetables.

During the December review, the American people deserve to hear from the new commander on the ground. We heard General Petraeus report on the surge when he led our forces in Iraq. The Armed Services Committee should hear from General Petraeus on the Afghanistan surge also. Absent hearing from General Petraeus the next Congress will not be able to effectively evaluate the President's plan to begin the transfer of our forces out of Afghanistan.

Victory depends in large part on the will of the American people—and the President has sole responsibility to rally all Americans, regardless of domestic political considerations, around our troops and their mission.

Leadership in Iraq

Despite what some on the left say today, the success of the Iraq surge is undeniable and our troops, along with their families, deserve great credit for their courage and sacrifice. Our military has done all that we have asked them to do in Iraq. Generals Petraeus and Odierno successfully built a security architecture that allows U.S. forces to ensure Iraqi security there through 2011.

The future U.S.-Iraq relationship remains uncertain, however. The U.S. "advise and assist" force presence expires December 31st next year. Will that continue? Will the U.S. continue to augment Iraq's investment in its security forces? Cutbacks in aid and advisory plans could end any chance of an effective strategic partnership with Iraq and lose the war by default. This is something we cannot accept.

As Republican Leader—soon to be Speaker—John Boehner said this past August, "the hard truth is that Iraq will continue to remain the target for those who hope to destroy freedom and democracy. The people of that nation—and this nation—deserve to know what America is prepared to do if the cause for which our troops sacrificed their lives in Iraq is

threatened.” Our military and civilian personnel in Iraq have answered the call of duty, now the Administration and the Congress must do the same.

Leadership in Budget

As elected officials, Members of Congress have a responsibility to ensure U.S. taxpayer dollars are not wasted on inefficient or redundant programs. I agree with Secretary Gates that we must scrutinize defense programs to ensure we are generating the most bang for the buck and that we must concentrate our limited resources on the highest priority programs.

Furthermore, I view it as the responsibility of the Armed Services Committee, through our annual defense law, to shift funds to higher national security priorities and promising technologies for the future, such as missile defense and means to counter anti-access threats.

Let’s remember one of the core responsibilities of the Congress—Article 1, Section 8 of the U.S. Constitution says: “Provide for the common defense”...“to raise and support armies”...and “to provide and maintain a navy.”

I am extremely concerned that no matter what the intentions of Secretary Gates may be, the Administration and some in Congress will not allow the Secretary to keep the savings identified in his efficiencies initiative. Just this summer, the White House supported a teacher bailout bill—a domestic spending measure—that was funded in part with defense dollars.

Secretary Gates can only do so much from the Pentagon. Sustaining growth for the Department of Defense requires leadership from the White House and the Office of Management and Budget. Once savings from this efficiencies initiative are identified, what’s to stop them from taking this money, too?

Secretary Gates appears to share my concern. In August he stated, “...my greatest fear is that in economic tough times that people will see the defense budget as the place to solve the nation's deficit problems, to find money for other parts of the government... I think that would be disastrous in the world environment we see today and what we’re likely to see in the years to come.”

I share the Secretary’s view that the growth in the Department’s topline is insufficient to address the future capabilities required by our military. One percent real growth in the defense budget over the next five years is a net cut for investment and procurement accounts.

A defense budget in decline portends an America in decline. It will undermine our ability to project power, strengthen our adversaries and weaken our alliances. This is a bipartisan view—not just one Republican’s opinion. The independent, bipartisan Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) panel appointed by Congress recognizes this fact. The co-chairmen of that independent panel, Bill Perry, the Secretary of Defense under President Clinton, and Steve Hadley, national security adviser under President George W. Bush, were clear on this point.

Their report states that our nation ‘cannot afford business as usual’, and warns of a ‘potential train wreck coming in the areas of personnel, acquisition and force structure.’ Significantly, the report offers a realistic view of the global security environment: that maintaining and growing our alliances will place an increased demand on American hard power and require an increase in our military’s force structure.

Let me put this in the simplest terms possible: cutting defense spending amidst two wars is a red line for me and should be a red line for all Americans. You do not need to be a policy expert to realize that investment is key to maintaining a robust defense.

Gallup recently said Americans are more likely now to say the United States’ national defense is “not strong enough.” *The Hill’s* 2010 Midterm Election Poll clearly states “six in 10 Republicans and 53 percent of independents said they would not accept cuts to defense and homeland security spending.” I note this was a poll conducted in battleground districts.

In this case, like in many others, Congress would be well advised to listen to the wisdom of the American people.

Leadership in Protecting the Homeland

Advocates for reducing the size of the military view the global security environment through the lens of what they hope it to be and fail to see it for what it really is. As the recent air cargo plot and the Christmas Day terrorist attack reminded us, al Qaeda and its affiliates continue to threaten the homeland. Arguably the greatest example of failed leadership in national security is the President’s mishandling of the war on terror and the Guantanamo detainees.

The Nigerian who attacked a U.S. airliner on Christmas Day trained in Yemen in an organization known as al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. One of the spiritual leaders of AQAP, we know now, is an American-born cleric who radicalized Major Hasan, the U.S. Army psychiatrist who killed 13 at Ft. Hood.

Now this organization, with ties to the Ft. Hood massacre, which planned and organized the Christmas Day attack and the recent air cargo plot, has in its leadership a former Guantanamo detainee. You would think this would make the

President reevaluate his Guantanamo policy; that the President would see the perils of closing Guantanamo and the risk of returning detainees to countries already riddled with ungoverned spaces and al Qaeda cells.

The simple truth is that relaxing our Guantanamo policy puts Americans at risk.

I believe America is the target of militant radicalism, not its source. I believe America is a force for peace in the world, not a cause of strife. And I believe we have a responsibility to defeat our enemies wherever they are, not “treat and release” them as if they were run of the mill domestic criminals.

My position is simple: No more mirandizing terrorists. No more trials in downtown Manhattan. No more terrorist transfers to Yemen. The American people need a new terrorist detainee policy.

Protecting the homeland and fighting radicalism abroad is only part of the challenge we face today. Other adversaries and enemies seek to do us harm too. Whether dealing with a former adversary like Russia, a competitor like China or a present-day adversary like Iran and North Korea, I’m concerned that the President’s emphasis on engagement has translated into weakness. It is putting our national security at risk.

In fact, in a recent conversation with a Combatant Commander, he shared with me that he constantly fights the perception that the United States is in decline. What is driving this perception? Certainly the Administration’s diplomacy contributes to the problem.

But a deeper question lingers: will America abandon a leadership role in support of its national interests? As the bipartisan Quadrennial Defense Review independent panel concluded: “To do so will simply lead to an increasingly unstable and unfriendly global climate and eventually to conflicts America cannot ignore, which we must then prosecute with limited choices under unfavorable circumstances—and with stakes that are higher than anyone would like.”

At stake is U.S. global leadership: If the Administration fails to modernize and grow our military force structure, views of America in decline will harden and cause allegiances to shift. Those who think that if the U.S. does less globally others will step up are correct: others will fill the vacuum—but it won’t be our allies. The UK with its cuts to defense won’t assure the freedom of the global commons.

Rather, competitors like China will fill the void, and adversaries like Iran and North Korea will become more hostile. While China today may not intend to attack our carriers, neutralize our bases in Japan and Guam, or push back our naval presence out of the South China Sea, they are without question making the investments and developing capabilities to do just that.

The question is whether we will be ready and capable to respond—the answer is unclear. To protect the homeland, our forward-deployed forces, deter and defend against Iran, protect Israel and other allies, we can't just talk about missile defense—we need to invest in missile defense. This means more Aegis ships, more proven technologies and maintaining the interceptors in the United States.

Our adversaries and allies are watching. They know how to distinguish between rhetoric and action. When U.S. leadership is in question—by allies or adversaries—global stability is at risk.

Republicans Leading the House of Representatives

A year ago, my critiques of Administration policy hit on similar themes, but our capacity to respond to those policies now is entirely different. So, for the remainder of my remarks, I'd like to share my plans for how I would lead the Armed Services Committee in the coming Congress—if selected by my peers.

Bipartisanship—The House Armed Services Committee stands apart from the rest of the authorizing committees of the House for a number of reasons, chief among them is its commitment to bipartisanship. This will continue. This is bipartisanship not simply in word, but in deed. The HASC has largely resisted the heated partisanship that pervades the capitol because all members understand the solemn duty of serving on the committee: we serve to support and care for the men and women in uniform.

Where there is disagreement that divides along party lines, the committee will continue the practice of debating an issue on the merits. In fact, this is precisely the type of committee oversight that John Boehner believes the whole House should adopt. Consistent with Leader Boehner's vision, all legislation that the Armed Services Committee adopts will be prepared to hit the floor and be subject to an open rule. We are one of the few—if not the only—committee where every amendment offered by a member will enjoy a full debate with an up or down vote.

Debate in our committee will be rooted in policy—not politics. The merit of one's amendment will determine legislative success. This is a legacy to be proud of and one that will continue.

Clean Defense Authorization Bills—Unfortunately, over the past couple of years, the Democratic leadership has departed from tradition. They have used the defense bill to advance a controversial agenda on the backs of our military men and women. Whether it be the hate crimes legislation, immigration, or don't ask don't tell the defense bill has been used as a vehicle to divide instead of unite the Congress.

This must end today. The National Defense Authorization Act—especially in wartime—should be focused on one core equity: caring and providing for the men and women in uniform and their families.

Emphasis on Oversight and Investigations—In carrying out our constitutional mandate we will place renewed emphasis on oversight and investigations. Our investigations will be relevant to the war fighter and the protection of our homeland—while protecting the integrity of the military and its personnel.

First, our focus will be on winning the wars in Afghanistan—not solely on ending the conflict. What does this mean? We will ensure the war fighter is getting what they need to accomplish their mission. For example, if the arbitrary troop cap set by the President is impacting force protection and the deployment of other enablers, our committee will work vigorously to expose the problem and see that it is addressed.

If our commanders in Afghanistan send Washington a joint urgent operational need statement and it languishes in the Pentagon bureaucracy—we will expedite the process. Most importantly, we will challenge any attempt to deny our forces enablers and force protection, because of an arbitrary, politically imposed troop cap.

Detainee Policy—We will also focus on detainee policy. The days of U.S. courts making policy through case law must come to an end. Armed Services Committee Members will work to craft a legislative framework for terrorist detention that protects the homeland, respects the rule of law, and upholds our high ideals. We need to keep terrorists off of our soil, not invite them here and pay for their legal representation.

We need to reaffirm—in statute—the authorization to use military force of 2001. Our forces in Afghanistan and around the world do not doubt that we continue to be at war with al Qaeda and its affiliated networks. They put their lives at risk every day. Therefore, Congress should ensure no court in the land questions the legal authority for our forces to prosecute this war.

Make no mistake: the Armed Services Committee will conduct thorough oversight of this Administration's detainee policies and work to legislate a framework that is guided by the law of armed conflict – not the criminal justice system.

DoD Transparency—A broader challenge for our oversight is the Administration's lack of transparency. The Department of Defense, led by Secretary Gates, is guilty of this as well. Whether it is stiff arming the Committee on document requests related to the closure of Joint Forces Command, to mandatory gag-orders being imposed on the military, or willful noncompliance on statutorily mandated reports, this committee will assert its oversight prerogative.

Conclusion

Let me conclude by stepping back from Capitol Hill, and take a moment to explain why in the midst of the significant national security challenges I've discussed this afternoon we all have reason to be optimistic. My optimism is

rooted in the spirit and courage of the men and women, military and civilian alike, who serve to defend our country and provide for its security.

You know, I've been around a while. I understand what it means to call a generation, "the greatest generation". This is not because I read a book about the greatest generation, but because I knew the men of that generation. I remember seeing them leave their families to fight for our freedom and liberate the oppressed. And I saw those men return home.

One of those men was my father.

That generation defeated fascism and restored liberty in Europe and Asia, returned home after the war and had the vision, grit and fortitude to fight communism and ultimately prevail in the Cold War. They ushered America into an era of prosperity and showed the world that our country, our system of government, our freedoms, and our compassion were unmatched and unparalleled. The greatest generation made America great.

I saw it when I was kid at the end of World War II and I see it again today.

Our veterans who fought on the battlefields of Baghdad and Fallujah and the young volunteers who are fighting today on the battlefields in Helmand and Kandahar are the next great generation. Their stories of courage and sacrifice in the service of freedom and liberty have yet to be fully chronicled, but I'm certain history will rank their service the best this nation has ever seen.

But their story is not complete. Their service in Iraq and Afghanistan is only the first chapter. The civil affairs officer who served in northern Iraq, the logistician who operated out of Balad air base, or the Provincial Reconstruction Team member who is bringing stability to eastern Afghanistan, will return home and lead our country.

Some will govern at the state level, more will be the innovators and entrepreneurs that will restore our economy to greatness, and still others will serve with me in the 112th Congress—and serve with me currently in the 111th Congress. All are patriots who will know what it means to sacrifice for freedom.

Our nation will look to them, just as it did to the veterans of another war over 60 years ago, and they will deliver. The next chapter in the chronicles of this generation is about to be written. We've only begun to see their accomplishments. I'm optimistic that our nation will benefit from the results. The fruits of their labor will be nothing less than another era of American prosperity. For this, there is reason for optimism.

Thank you and God Bless.